AVATAR

The Last Airbender

Show #304

BOOK THREE: Fire
CHAPTER FOUR: "Sokka's Master"

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FADE IN:

EXT. FIRE NATION ISLAND - NIGHT

Aang, Katara, Sokka, and Toph are camped for the night, looking up at the sky. Above them flashes a magnificent METEOR SHOWER. Shooting stars fill the sky. It's glorious.

KATARA
Wow, this is amazing to watch.

SOKKA
Kind of makes you realize how insignificant we are.

Just then, a particularly bright one STREAKS across the sky. We reveal Toph who just SHRUGS.

TOPH
Eh. You seen nothing once, you've seen it a thousand times.

KATARA/ SOKKA / AANG
Oooooh!!

As the kids look at the sky, one shooting star grows bigger and brighter in the sky, coming nearer to Earth.

SOKKA
Oh man... you've never not seen anything like this!

A SCREAMING, BURNING SOUND like a fighter jet passing overhead echoes over the kids as the meteor (now a meteorite) rockets over them and CRASHES with a BOOM in a wood a couple of miles away.

The kids look over where the meteorite landed. A glow of fire grows in the distance, and they share a concerned look.

EXT. SKY - LATER

The kids fly on Appa over the meteorite crash site, which is now a raging forest fire. From the air they can see a town on the edge of the woods. The fire is heading toward it.

KATARA
The fire is going to destroy that town!

AANG
Not if we can stop it!

He angles Appa down between the town and the fire.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Appa lands and the kids jump off, ready for action.

KATARA
There's a creek over here! I'll bend the water onto the fire!

AANG
Toph, let's make a trench to keep the fire from coming any closer!

They start to run off and Sokka stands with his club at the ready, looking around.

SOKKA
What should I do?

The kids stop for a moment, trying to think of a way Sokka can help. Aang sees Momo fluttering around, freaking out.

AANG
Keep an eye on Momo!

SOKKA
So what, I'm just a lemur-sitter?

But the kids have already run off. Sokka trudges over to Momo. He grabs Momo, patting his head.

SOKKA
There, there. Feel better?

Meanwhile, Aang and Toph create a giant trench to prevent the spread of the fire. Katara runs to a stream and bends the water up and out of its bed, forming it into a massive firehose to douse the flames.

Toph Earthbends a GAP, pushing a burning cluster of trees away from their non-burning neighbors. Aang winds up for a big Airbending move, but sees Sokka creeping close to watch the action.

AANG
Sokka! Stand clear!

Sokka nods, again totally disappointed.

SOKKA
Right. Stand clear. Got it.

He shuffles out of the way as Aang performs an incredible freezing Water/Airbending move that puts out the fire and makes the blackened trees look like a winter wonderland in a snowglobe. Aang, Toph and Katara stand around their handiwork, grinning proudly.

AANG
Good work, everybody.

Sokka, meanwhile, hangs back, dejected. Momo shoots by him, skating on the ice happily.

INT. FIRE NATION PRISON - DAY

A Fire Nation prison guard, WARDEN POON, walks down a dank prison hallway with a bowl of food. He reaches the end of the hall and looks into the last cell. Iroh sits on the bunk of the cell. He looks fat and disheveled, his hair is a mess, he's dirty, and he probably stinks. He wears a BLANK, DUMB LOOK on his face, like he's been completely broken by his imprisonment.

The guard shoves the food through the bars of the cell, and Uncle grabs it and starts shoving the food in his face with his hands, getting rice all over himself. The guard shakes his head, disgusted.

WARDEN POON
Look at you. You're just a fat, disgusting old man.

Uncle ignores him.

WARDEN POON
You do nothing, you say nothing, you just eat and roll around in your own filth like a pig.

Uncle still doesn't respond, like he doesn't hear the guard.

WARDEN POON
You're a disgrace.

He spits on the ground and walks away from the cell. As soon as he's out of sight, Uncle drops his "imbecile face" and we see the old twinkle return to his eyes. He smiles, then wipes his mouth and picks up some chopsticks. He resumes eating, this time like the civilized Uncle we know and love.

INT. FIRE NATION TOWN RESTAURANT - NEXT DAY

The kids, wearing their Fire Nation disguises, sit at a table digging into some Fire Nation chow. Sokka sulks, not touching the smoking bowl of food in front of him. Aang looks around at the other patrons.

AANG
These people have no idea how close they were to getting toasted last night.

TOPH
Yeah, the worst thing about being in disguise is we don't get the hero worship anymore. I miss the love.

SOKKA
(sarcastic pouting)
Boo-hoo. Poor heroes.

KATARA
What's your problem? You haven't even touched your smoked sea slug.

SOKKA
It's just... All you guys can do this awesome bending stuff, like putting out forest fires and flying around and making other stuff fly around... I can't fly around, okay?! I can't do anything.

The kids are a little shocked to see Sokka so down on himself. They try to warm him up.

KATARA
That's not true. No one can read a map like you.

TOPH
I can't read at all!

AANG
Yeah, and who keeps us laughing with sarcastic comments all the time? I mean, look at Katara's hair. Right? What's up with that?

He looks to Sokka for a witty barb, but nothing. Katara, meanwhile, checks her hair in the reflection of a knife.

KATARA
What? What's wrong with my hair?

Aang quickly backtracks.

AANG
Nothing, I was just trying to...

Sokka looks at them wearily.

SOKKA
Look, I appreciate the effort. But the fact is, each of you is so amazing and so special, and I'm... not. I'm just the guy in the group who's regular.

They all look at him, worried.

KATARA
I'm sorry you're feeling so down, but I hope you know none of us see you that way.
(beat, then confidently)
I know something that's going to make you feel better.

SOKKA
(especially pathetic)
You do?

Katara NODS, as we...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. FIRE NATION WEAPONS STORE - DAY

ANGLE ON: Sokka's smiling face, as he claps his hands together excitedly.

SOKKA
Shopping!

The kids browse through a shop filled with a vast selection of weapons and armor.

SOKKA
Maybe a little something to reinvigorate my battling. Hey, how 'bout these?

He picks up a pair of NUNCHAKU and starts whipping them around.

SOKKA
(CRAZY NUNCHAKU SOUNDS, THEN)
Smacka-dacka-doo!

He works them impressively for a moment, then whacks himself in the head, sending himself stumbling backwards.

SOKKA
("OOF")

As Sokka tries to right himself, Aang lumbers out of a dressing room in full heavy battle armor. He checks himself out in a mirror. Katara comes over to look at him.

AANG
What do you think? Pretty slick, huh? All I need to complete the outfit is a wind sword.

KATARA
What's a wind sword?

AANG
It's where I get a sword handle... and then I just swing this around and bend air out like a blade...

He reaches over into a bin full of sword handles and holds one up in front of him. He starts swinging the handle around like a full sword.

AANG
(WHOOSHING NOISES)

Katara rolls her eyes and nods.

KATARA
Yeah. Nice. *

She pats him on the shoulder, and the weight of the armor sends Aang CRASHING to the ground.

AANG
I'll just stick to what I got.

Meanwhile, Sokka grabs various weapons off the wall, making menacing faces in the mirror while posing with spears, giant axes, maces, and other cool battle gear.

Finally he looks up over the counter at the front of the store and sees a BEAUTIFUL SWORD hanging on the wall. He drops the weapon he's holding, transfixed.

SOKKA
Ooooh... That's what Sokka's talking about.

The SHOPKEEPER at the front sees him looking.

SHOPKEEPER
You have a good eye. That's an original from Piandao, the greatest sword master and sword maker in Fire Nation history. He lives in the big castle up the road from here.

The rest of the kids have followed Sokka to the front of the store and have overheard the shopkeeper.

AANG
("Eureka!")
That's it! That's what you needed all along, Sokka.

SOKKA
A sword?

AANG
Not the sword, a master. We've all had masters to help us get better. You should see if you can study with Piandao.

KATARA
That's a great idea. I could never have gotten to where I am without Master Pakku. Everyone needs a teacher.

TOPH
I learned from badger-moles. They don't talk, but they're still good teachers.

Sokka considers the idea of having a master.

SOKKA
It would be nice to be a master swordfighter...

He looks up at the sword again.

SOKKA
All right. I'll talk to him.

INT. UNCLE'S CELL - DAY

Uncle sits on his bunk. He puts his feet under the rail at the end of the bed, then lies back with his hands folded behind his head like he's going to take a nap. Suddenly he BURSTS into action and starts knocking out SIT-UPS. They're not the slow, creaky sit-ups of an old man, but the quick, crisp movements of a well-conditioned athlete.

EXT. PIANDAO'S CASTLE - DAY

Sokka stands at the front door of the castle (which is emblazoned with a WHITE LOTUS, although it shouldn't necessarily register now). He knocks on the door, and it's opened by FAT, Piandao's butler. Fat looks at Sokka dubiously.

FAT
Can I help you?

SOKKA
I've come to train with the master.

FAT
You should know that the master turns almost everyone away. What did you bring him to prove your worth?

Sokka looks nervous, feeling like he forgot his homework.

SOKKA
Well, uhhh...

He pats himself down, looking for something good to offer. He's got nothing. Fat nods dismissively.

FAT
Right. Let's get this over with.

He leads Sokka inside.

INT. PIANDAO'S STUDY - DAY

Fat and Sokka enter the master's study to find PIANDAO sitting quietly, painting a beautiful still life of some flowers that he has arranged. He's a steely, serious-looking old gentleman who moves gracefully, a sword at his side. Sokka and Fat wait as he finishes a brush-stroke.

He puts down his paints and slowly turns to look at them. He raises an eyebrow -- Fat cues Sokka to step forward.

SOKKA
Master, my name is Sokka, and I wish to be instructed in the way of the sword.

PIANDAO
Sokka? That's an unusual name.

SOKKA
(fumbling)
Oh, uh, really? Where I come from -- the Fire Nation colonies -- it's a pretty normal name. For Fire Nation colonials.

PIANDAO
Let me guess, you've come hundreds of miles from your little village where you're the best swordsman in town and you think you deserve to learn from the master?

SOKKA
Well, actually I've been all over the world...

Piandao rolls his eyes.

PIANDAO
Yup, here we go.

Sokka drops to his knees.

SOKKA
And I know one thing for sure: I have a lot to learn.

Piandao looks at Sokka puzzled.

PIANDAO
You're not doing a very good job at selling yourself.

SOKKA
I know. Your butler told me that when I met you I would have to prove my worth. But the truth is, I don't know if I am worthy.

PIANDAO
Hmmm. I see.

Piandao looks at Sokka for a moment, intrigued.

PIANDAO
Well then, let's find out together how worthy you are. I will train you.

Off Sokka's look of happy shock...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. PIANDAO'S GARDEN - DAY

Sokka stands before Piandao, wearing a new TRAINING OUTFIT.

PIANDAO
The first thing you must learn is that your weapon is an extension of yourself -- you must think of it as another part of your own body.

SOKKA
(nodding confidently)
Like a second head.

PIANDAO
Well, more like an extra-long really-sharp arm.

Piandao gives Sokka a fiery look and draws his sword in one quick motion.

PIANDAO
The sword is a simple tool -- but in the hands of a master, it becomes the most versatile of weapons. And just as the imagination is limitless, so too are the possibilities of the sword.

He puts the sword back in its scabbard with another fluid motion.

EXT. KIDS' CAMP - DAY

The kids lie around their camp, looking a little aimless.

AANG
What should we do today?

TOPH
I'm tapped out. I already picked my toes. Twice.

AANG
Twice?

TOPH
The first time's for cleaning, but the second time's just for the sweet picking sensation.

KATARA
Sokka's been in charge of the schedule, I'm not sure what we should be doing.

TOPH
Plus it's so hot today.

Aang beams and looks over at Toph expectantly.

AANG
(joke set-up style)
How hot is it?!

Toph just shrugs.

TOPH
I dunno. Real hot?

Katara tries to pitch in.

KATARA
It's so hot...

She scrambles for a punch-line. She picks up Momo.

KATARA
It's so hot, Momo is shedding like Appa! Huh? Huh?

She shakes Momo. A few hairs fall off.

MOMO
(ANNOYED CHITTERING)

Aang shakes his head sadly.

AANG
I guess the jokes don't run in the family.

APPA
(BORED GROAN)

KATARA
Oh, everyone's a critic.

INT. UNCLE'S CELL - DAY

Uncle looks at the rock wall of his cell, finds hand-holds in the crevices, and starts climbing the wall.

When he's a few feet off the ground, he looks over his shoulder at the nearest wall, like he's marking a position on it. He takes a deep breath, then launches himself away from the wall he's on, turning in mid-air and grabbing for the other wall like a cat. He slides down a little ways before securing a hold and stopping himself from falling. When he's caught himself, he climbs up that wall a few feet and repeats the exercise, leaping back to the other wall.

INT. PIANDAO'S LIBRARY - DAY

Piandao leads Sokka into the library of the castle. He reaches into a cabinet and pulls out a paintbrush. He hands it to Sokka, then pulls out some rice paper and ink.

PIANDAO
The warrior practices a variety of arts to keep his mind sharp and fluid. The first you will learn is calligraphy. Write your name.

SOKKA
Writing my name will make me a better swordsman?

PIANDAO
When you write your name, you stamp the paper with your identity. You must learn to use your sword to stamp your identity on a battlefield.

Sokka dips his brush in the ink, then starts to write. Before his brush hits the paper, Piandao interrupts him.

PIANDAO
Remember, you cannot take back a stroke of the brush, or a stroke of the sword.

Sokka is now a little nervous, and without making a mark withdraws the brush from the page. He strikes a contemplative pose, holding the brush to his lips as he thinks.

PIANDAO
You are getting ink on your face.

SOKKA
I am?
(then, getting an idea)
I am! So this is about putting my identity on the page, right?

Piandao NODS. Sokka SMEARS ink all over his face, and PRESSES his face onto the paper, leaving a FACEPRINT. Then he turns to smile at Piandao (and it should be funny to see smiley inky Sokka next to his own faceprint), but Piandao's reaction is inscrutable.

INT. PIANDAO'S SWORDFIGHTING GYM - DAY

In a big, open room, Sokka wears a swordfighting uniform and holds a wooden sword. Fat stands across from him, outfitted in full battle gear and helmet, also holding a wooden sword. Piandao watches from the side. Sokka and Fat bow to each other, then begin fighting. Fat quickly disarms Sokka, then chases him around the room, WHACKING him harmlessly with his wooden sword.

EXT. PIANDAO'S GROUNDS - DAY

Piandao leads a BLINDFOLDED Sokka to the top of a nearby hill.

PIANDAO
Landscape painting teaches a warrior to hold the lay of the land in his mind. In battle, you only have an instant to take everything in...

He removes Sokka's blindfold.

REVERSE ANGLE ON: A beautiful vista with trees, mountains, a lake, and all the elements of a great landscape painting.

After a few short seconds, Piandao turns Sokka around so he can no longer see the landscape. In front of him now is an easel and canvas, paint palettes, etc.

PIANDAO
Now paint it. And no peeking!

Sokka nods and starts painting.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PIANDAO'S GROUNDS - LATER

CLOSE ON: Sokka's face, as with great focus and concentration he carefully applies the last tiny detail to his painting. Now a satisfied look crosses his face.

SOKKA
I'm finished!

Piandao turns the painting around so that he can compare it to the actual vista. First, he takes another long look at the beautiful landscape. Then he looks down and for the first time we reveal Sokka's painting: It looks like it was done by a kindergartner with finger paints, and it seemingly has no connection to the actual vista. It is a picture of a tree and a cloud and a rainbow.

PIANDAO
You added a rainbow.

SOKKA
Is that okay?

Sokka looks up hopefully at Piandao, but again his reaction is inscrutable.

INT. PIANDAO'S SWORDFIGHTING GYM - DAY

Sokka and Fat fight again with their wooden swords. This time, Sokka holds off Fat for a while. He starts to get a confident look on his face. As he fights--

PIANDAO
Sokka!

Sokka turns to look at him. When he does, Fat swats him with his sword and knocks him down.

PIANDAO
Concentrate on what you're doing.

Sokka nods, beaten again.

EXT. PIANDAO'S ROCK GARDEN - DAY

Piandao leads Sokka into his rock garden.

PIANDAO
Rock gardening teaches the warrior to manipulate his surroundings and use them to his advantage.

Sokka looks at the rock garden for a beat, thinking.

SOKKA
Hmmm. Manipulate them to my advantage...
(getting an idea)
Oooh!

Sokka begins moving rocks, piling them under a small tree. It is clear that Sokka is up to something, but right now we are not sure what he is doing. Sokka finds a huge boulder covered in moss -- carefully, he peels the MOSS off in a long sheet. Sokka smiles to himself.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON: Sokka who has a relaxed look on his face. We widen to reveal that Sokka is relaxing in a LOUNGE CHAIR that he has created out of the rocks, and covered with the sheet of moss. This should resemble someone lounging under an umbrella on a sandy beach. Sokka really kicks back, putting his hands behind his head.

SOKKA
Ahh...

Sokka looks at Piandao whose expression is again inscrutable. Fat enters and shakes his head at Sokka, disdainfully.

SOKKA
(to Fat)
Hey, would you mind grabbing a cold drink for me?

Fat, outraged, FUMES.

PIANDAO
(to Fat)
I'll take a slice of lemon in mine, please.

114A FAT 114A
(EXASPERATED SIGH)

INT. PIANDAO'S SWORDFIGHTING GYM - DAY

Sokka faces off with Fat again, and this time he manages to knock Fat's fake wooden sword out of his hands. Sokka smiles and turns to Piandao (who now has a cold drink with a slice of lemon), bowing. As he bows, Fat kicks him in the butt, knocking him down. He looks up to find Fat standing over him with Sokka's own fake wooden sword. Sokka grimaces, embarrassed.

INT. UNCLE'S CELL - DAY

Uncle does push-ups in the middle of his cell. He starts popping up between push-ups, CLAPPING his hands before catching himself.

INT. FIRE NATION PRISON - SAME

The guard hears the CLAPPING and starts quickly walking toward Uncle's cell.

WARDEN POON
What's going on in there?

He reaches Uncle's cell and looks in. Uncle lies on his back with the "imbecile look" back on his face. He stares at the ceiling and CLAPS his hands in front of his face, like he's trying to squash an invisible bug that's flying around him. The guard shakes his head.

WARDEN POON
Crazy old man.

He walks off down the hall. Uncle smiles.

EXT. KIDS' CAMP - DAY

Katara and Aang look at a map of the Fire Nation Islands while Toph sits nearby.

KATARA
So where are we going next? We're starting from here...

She points to an island on the map.

AANG
(correcting her)
No, we're over on this island.

He points to a different island on the map. Toph shakes her head.

TOPH
You noodle-brains don't know what you're doing. I miss Sokka.

KATARA
Ooh! I got one...

Katara gives Aang a sly look, ready for another joke attempt.

KATARA
If you miss him so much, why don't you marry him?

Aang and Toph shake their heads in disappointment.

EXT. PIANDAO'S GARDEN - SUNSET

Sokka sits across from Piandao in the lotus position.

PIANDAO
You've had a good first day of training.

Sokka looks at him, surprised.

SOKKA
I have? But I thought I messed up every single thing we worked on.

PIANDAO
You messed things up in a very special way. You are ready for a real sword.

SOKKA
(EXCITED GASP) Are you giving me one of yours?

PIANDAO
No. Your sword must be an extension of yourself. So tomorrow... you will make your own sword.

Off Sokka's look of anticipation...

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. PIANDAO'S SWORDMAKING SHOP - DAY

Piandao leads Sokka into the shop and Sokka looks around, wide-eyed. Incredibly beautiful swords hang all around. The shop has hammers and anvils and a brightly glowing fire with a massive bellows to stoke it to the heat necessary for melting raw metal into intricate works of martial art. Wooden handles sit next to racks of silk ribbon to wrap them. Piandao lays out some ingots of various grades of steel.

PIANDAO
Choosing the correct material is the most important step in crafting a sword. You must trust your steel with your life. Choose carefully.

Sokka picks up a couple of ingots, trying to feel their heft and judge which one would be right for him. Sokka concentrates for a moment, then has an idea. He puts down the ingot he's holding.

SOKKA
Master, would it be possible for me to leave and bring back a special material for my sword?

Piandao looks at him, intrigued, and nods.

PIANDAO
I wouldn't have it any other way.

EXT. KIDS' CAMP - DAY

The kids sit around the camp, totally bored. Suddenly Toph jumps up.

TOPH
Sokka's coming!

Aang and Katara hop up excitedly to see Sokka approaching. He waves.

SOKKA
Hey, guys. What are you doing?

They all run to him with wide smiles on their faces and give the surprised Sokka a big hug.

AANG/ TOPH/ KATARA
Sokka!/ You're back!/ We missed you so much!

AANG
Say something funny!

SOKKA
Funny how?

AANG/ KATARA
(UPROARIOUS LAUGHTER)

Sokka looks over at Toph.

SOKKA
What's their deal?

TOPH
(shrugging)
I don't know. They missed you or something. I didn't care.

SOKKA
Thanks. That warms my heart. Anyway, I need some help.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. METEORITE CRATER - DAY

Sokka and the kids walk up to the massive crater created by the space rock. Sokka points -- down at the bottom of the hole, they can see the PITCH-BLACK METEORITE glistening iridescently in the sun.

INT. UNCLE'S CELL

Uncle sits in the lotus position in the middle of his cell. He leans forward, putting his hands in front of him, then puts his head down and transitions into a headstand, extending his legs up over him. He lifts himself into a handstand, then starts pumping out handstand push-ups.

EXT. PIANDAO'S CASTLE - DAY

The kids work together to roll the big black boulder up to the front door of Piandao's castle. Sokka knocks on the door. Piandao appears.

PIANDAO
(re: the kids)
Who's this?

SOKKA
Oh, these are my friends. Just other good Fire Nation folks.

Piandao nods hello to them, then goes to look at the meteorite. Sokka watches him hopefully.

SOKKA
Do you think we can make a sword out of a meteorite?

Piandao looks at him, impressed.

PIANDAO
We'll make a sword unlike any other in the world.

Sokka beams.

INT. PIANDAO'S SWORDMAKING SHOP - DAY

BEGIN SWORDMAKING MONTAGE:

Piandao and Sokka break the meteorite into pieces and stick them in the fire to melt down. Fat works the bellows to stoke the fire.

Piandao pours the molten metal into a mold.

As Piandao coaches him, Sokka uses tongs to pull the red-hot sword out of the mold and dunks into a water tank to cool. Steam fills the room.

Sokka pounds the side of the sword, hammering it to an edge as Piandao watches. The blade is BLACK and GLISTENING.

Sokka sharpens the edges of his blade on a grinding wheel. Sparks fly all over the shop.

Sokka rubs the sword with oil, polishing it to a high shine.

Piandao and Sokka fit the sword into its handle, then wrap it with leather and fine glittery fabric. It's changed from a hunk of rock into a work of art.

END SWORDMAKING MONTAGE.

INT. PIANDAO'S CASTLE - DAY

In a decorative, almost cathedral-like hallway in Piandao's castle, Sokka kneels on a cushion, dressed in a flowing, ceremonial robe. Piandao stands before him, also dressed in a beautiful robe. Aang, Katara, and Toph look on from the side, beaming with pride.

PIANDAO
Sokka, when you first arrived, you were so unsure -- you even seemed down on yourself. But I saw something in you right away. I saw a heart as strong as a lion-turtle and twice as big.
(beat)
And as we trained, it wasn't your skills that impressed me. No, it certainly wasn't your skills.

Piandao thinks back and SHAKES HIS HEAD.

PIANDAO
You showed something beyond that. Creativity. Versatility. Intelligence. These are the traits that define a great swordsman. And these are the traits that define you.

The kids are a little choked up, watching Sokka's big moment with his master. Piandao presents Sokka with the sword, which is the most incredibly beautiful sword we've ever seen.

PIANDAO
You told me you didn't know if you were worthy. But I believe that you are more worthy than any man I have ever trained.

As Sokka takes the sword, tears start to well up in his eyes.

SOKKA
I'm sorry, master, you're wrong. I am not worthy.

Piandao gives him a puzzled look.

SOKKA
I'm not who you think I am. I'm not from the Fire Nation, I'm from the Southern Water Tribe.
(MORE)

SOKKA (cont'd)
I lied so that I could learn swordsmanship from you. I'm sorry.

The kids share a panicked look. They can't believe that Sokka just blew his cover. They look at Piandao to see what his reaction will be. Piandao trembles with rage.

PIANDAO
I'm sorry too.

He draws his own sword. Sokka looks up at Piandao, shocked. The other kids rush to his side, ready to fight. Sokka shakes his head and gestures them away.

SOKKA
This is my fight. Alone.

The kids exchange a look and slowly back away. Sokka stands up, and looking Piandao in the eye, draws his own sword.

INT. FIRE NATION PRISON - DAY

The prison guard walks down the hall with food for Uncle. As he reaches the cell, he looks at Uncle, who is sitting with his dumb, broken look.

WARDEN POON
(scoffing)
You used to be the pride of the Fire Nation, our top general, the Dragon of the West. Now look at you. Look what you've become.

He tosses Uncles' food into the cell and walks away.

INT. UNCLE'S CELL - SAME

When the guard is gone, Uncle stands up and we see what he has become. He opens his robe and the pillow he's been using as a fake stomach falls out. Uncle strips off his robe, unveiling his new, incredibly ripped body, surging with powerful muscles. He slings his robe around a pipe that runs across the ceiling of his cell, wraps the other end around his right wrist, and starts doing one-armed pull-ups. He's a tight, muscle-bound monster.

INT. PIANDAO'S CASTLE - DAY

Sokka and Piandao square off, swords drawn. They circle each other for a moment, then Piandao attacks. Sokka barely manages to block the thrust, stumbling backwards. Piandao comes at him again, and Sokka scurries up a flight of stairs. Piandao allows a little smile.

PIANDAO
Excellent. Using your superior agility against an older opponent. Smart.

He goes after Sokka on the stairs, and Sokka wards him off for a moment, then hops over the railing to the ground below. Piandao smiles again.

PIANDAO
Good use of terrain, fighting from the high ground.

Piandao runs down the stairs and chases Sokka outside, continuing his attack. He moves closer and closer, and Sokka can barely keep Piandao's blade away. The kids follow.

EXT. PIANDAO'S GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Piandao drives Sokka into the rock garden. He takes an aggressive swing, but Sokka ducks and rolls away behind a rock. Piandao grins, still attacking wildly.

PIANDAO
Yes! Use your surroundings! Make them fight for you!

As he comes after Sokka again, Sokka trips. But before Piandao can reach him, Sokka throws some dirt in Piandao's face, blinding him. Sokka gets up and attacks.

PIANDAO
(spitting out dirt)
Very resourceful.

Sokka swings his sword at Piandao, but Piandao, still totally blind, makes an incredible series of moves that knocks Sokka's sword away and sends Sokka tumbling to the ground. The kids run up to defend their fallen friend, but Piandao merely sheathes his sword and snaps his fingers. Fat comes running up with a handkerchief and a glass of water. Piandao wipes his eyes and takes a drink.

PIANDAO
Excellent work, Sokka.

When his face is clean, he looks up at the kids, who still hold their fighting positions, looking confused. Piandao smiles.

PIANDAO
I think I'm a little old to be fighting the Avatar.

The kids share amazed looks.

AANG
How did you know?

PIANDAO
Oh, I've been around a while. You pick things up. Of course I knew from the beginning that Sokka was Water Tribe.

He gives Sokka a sly look.

PIANDAO
You might want to think of a better Fire Nation cover name. Try Lee. There's a million Lees.

KATARA
But why would you agree to train someone from the Water Tribe?

PIANDAO
The way of the sword doesn't belong to any one nation. Knowledge of the arts belongs to us all.

He turns to look at Sokka.

PIANDAO
Sokka, you must continue your training on your own. If you stay on this path, I know that one day you will become an even greater master than I am.

He bows, and Sokka bows back.

EXT. PIANDAO'S CASTLE - DAY

The kids start to walk away from Piandao's castle when the door opens and Fat runs out to them.

FAT
Wait! The master wanted you to have this as something to remember him by.

He hands Sokka something, then hustles back inside. Sokka opens his hands and the kids look at Piandao's gift: a white lotus Pai Sho tile.

SOKKA
It's a Pai Sho tile.

AANG
The white lotus. Huh.

KATARA
What does it mean?

SOKKA
I have no idea.

They turn back to look at the castle and notice the white lotus engraved on the door. They look at it for a second, then Sokka pockets the tile and they start to walk away.

SOKKA
Oh, that reminds me.

He reaches in his pocket and pulls out a little hunk of the meteorite.

SOKKA
Toph, I thought you might like this, since you've probably never had a chance to bend space earth before.

TOPH
Sweet! Check this out!

They look over and see Toph bending her little piece of meteorite into all kinds of exciting shapes. It shifts from a star, to a key, to a Nickelodeon "splat", morphing seamlessly from one to the next like magic mercury.

KATARA
I don't think there's such a thing as "space earth". If it's from space, then it's not really earth...

SOKKA
Must you ruin everything?

KATARA
I can't believe I missed you.

FADE OUT:

THE END.